

Phoenix bishop issues new norms on distribution, reception of Communion

PHOENIX - Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted has issued new norms for the distribution of Communion in the Diocese of Phoenix that entrust to pastors the decision to make available Communion under both kinds in their parishes.

Promulgated Nov. 7, the new norms for the Diocese of Phoenix are intended to promote greater reverence for the Blessed Sacrament. They are based on three church documents that provide guidance for celebrating Mass: the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, "Redemptionis Sacramentum" and the Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America.

Previously, The Catholic Sun, Phoenix diocesan newspaper, had reported that the norms, which were incomplete at the time, would restrict the availability of the precious blood to a limited number of occasions, such as certain feast days, retreats or special celebrations. What the norms state is that the distribution of Communion under both kinds will be based on eight conditions.

Evaluating whether these conditions are met - and whether Communion under both kinds may be offered at Mass - is at the discretion of the parish pastor or a priest chaplain to whom a community has been entrusted.

"The question was whether the new General Instruction of the Roman Missal was restricting when the chalice was offered, or whether it was expansive," said Father Kieran Kleczewski, executive director of the diocesan Office of Worship.

In preparing the new guidelines for Communion, the bishop and the Office of Worship determined that the General Instruction of the Roman Missal sought to expand and normalize the occasions for when the precious blood could be offered.

"This discussion has served as a reminder to us of the need to safeguard the

Eucharist,” Father Kleczewski said. “It calls us to a renewed catechesis of what we receive at every Mass.”

In his monthly column for The Catholic Sun, Bishop Olmsted discussed the new norms and the conditions found therein.

Among the conditions, the new norms call for the faithful to be properly catechized on the reality of the Eucharist. Additionally, if both kinds are offered, priests and deacons must be able to purify all the sacred vessels during or immediately after the conclusion of Mass.

If the precious blood is to be offered, the norms dictate there cannot exist any danger of it being profaned.

“Profanation does not only mean that the sacred species is intentionally abused or mistreated,” the bishop wrote, “but that it is merely treated as ordinary food and drink, rather than what it truly is, the body and blood of Christ.”

A large number of communicants could make it difficult to gauge the amount of wine to be consecrated. Pastors should be cautious so that more than a reasonable quantity of the precious blood does not remain after distribution.

There should also be an adequate number of ordinary ministers of the Eucharist. If not, there should be an adequate number of “properly deputed and trained” extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist.

That said, the number of extraordinary ministers should not obscure the role of the priest and deacon. Pastors should also consider health concerns, such as influenza or other contagious diseases, which might deter the faithful from approaching the chalice.

Also, following the Holy See’s instruction “Redemptionis Sacramentum” (“The Sacrament of Redemption”), pastors should take note when a sizable portion of the faithful prefers not to receive from the chalice. That circumstance is to be avoided because “the sign of unity would in some sense be negated.”

“The reality is that there’s going to be a variance in practice of when the chalice is

offered," Father Kleczewski said. "No two parishes are the same."

Nonetheless, the norms permit pastors to provide for the reception of Christ under the outward form of wine for those who cannot receive the consecrated host for health reasons, such as gluten allergies.

On the same day as the promulgation of the Phoenix norms, Bishop Patrick J. McGrath of San Jose announced to Catholics in his diocese that "Communion under both kinds is not only permitted but also encouraged and is expected to be the norm at every Sunday and feast day Mass."

Since 2003, Bishop McGrath has left the decision about whether to permit the distribution of Communion under both kinds up to individual pastors, as long as the faithful have been well instructed; there is no danger of profanation of the sacrament; and there is no danger of the rite becoming difficult because of the large number of participants or some other reason.